

The Air-Cooled Iconoclast – 1965 Chevrolet Corvair Corsa vs. Porsche 911

Christopher Fussner, September 2019, wobcars.com



Infamous for their unforgiving handling characteristics when driven at the limit, the first Porsche 911 and the second generation Chevrolet Corvair are more likely nemesis than either company intended or collectors may realize. Both offer six-cylinder air-cooled engines, placed distantly behind the rear seats. Both are lightweight grand touring 2+2 with a focus on sportiness, and both have a performance-oriented interior. In fact, they are so comparable in nature that it is a wonder as to why there is such a vast market price disparity. Current prices for one of these sixties Porsches have skyrocketed, while a Corvair acquisition commands a considerably more modest bank transaction. This disparity has led many enthusiasts eager to venture down the Porsche path to the 911's smaller sibling, the 912, which offers performance nearly akin to its stable mate. So that begets the question: is the Corvair a better way to attain 911 competitive performance than the 912?

While preferences toward exterior design remain among the most hotly-controversial topics of automotive conversations, they are ultimately subjective. Nevertheless, the 911 and the Corvair each offer their own unique sixties sports car styling in the form of chrome accents and sweeping body lines. Furthermore, either manufacturer guaranteed a wide selection of color options especially varied to ensure

at least one catches your fancy.

Reinvented for its second generation (1965-69) the initial take on the Corvair is that it has an instinctually American sedan appearance. In fairness, the Corvair did have a sedan counterpart. However, with this second attempt, Chevy chose to incorporate styling cues from two Pininfarina-commissioned Corvair projects. The decision injected a much-needed touch of European essence into the already quirky design, which buyers adored. Furthermore, the top-of-the-line Corsa coupe was now lower, wider, and offered an alluring B-pillarless design flowing back to thin C-pillars. All combined, it cultivated a generous greenhouse space that felt refreshingly airy. Aside from actually sitting closer to the ground, the wraparound line is set further down on the body, adding a bit of visual deception.

Exterior distinctiveness aside, the Chevy and Porsche feature cabin arrangements that are remarkably alike. With the engines over the rear axle, their floorboards lay relatively flat – increasing interior accommodations. Moreover, each car utilizes floating dashboards with multiple performance-oriented gauges to keep drivers informed with only a glance. Comparatively, the 911's centrally-located tachometer is racier while the Corvair Corsa's six-dial cluster is more comfortable to view since they all fit neatly between the steer-

ing wheel circumference. Wood dashboard inlays inside the black vinyl dash add flavor and warmth, especially when paired with the optional wood-rimmed steering wheel. Corvair owners could also elect for a wood-rimmed steering wheel to substitute the standard Bakelite unit, but it appears out-of-place given the lack of wood elsewhere.

Seating surfaces in the 911 are leather while vinyl chairs must placate the Corvair's crew. Either of which is available in several different colors that also alter the carpeting and door paneling. In the 911, bucket seats are standard while only Corsa Corvair's get buckets with tiny bolstering. Plainly put, the rear seats are more accessible in the Corvair, but their real use in either car is as a lowered parcel shelf. In Corsa trim, standard interior lighting, door-mounted armrests, and chrome gearshift boot aid to depreciate the amenity divide. In all, the arrangements and accouterments are nearly identical; going so far as to note that even the glove compartment doors prominently display model badges at the same location.

Given that these cars were not marketed against each other or designed as rivals, their competitive performance metrics are tight. Of course, any conversation about Corvair performance comes with many caveats and the complete furor of Ralph Nader's safety literature. While the



TUCSON CORVAIR ASSOCIATION
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TCA 2020 Events at a Glance

The **Corvairsation** is a monthly publication of the Tucson Corvair Association, which is dedicated to the preservation of the Corvair model of the Chevrolet Motor Division of General Motors. The Tucson Corvair Association is a chartered member of the Corvair Society of America (CORSA) as Chapter 357.

Membership dues are \$15 per year for individuals and \$18 for families. Initial dues are \$19 for individuals and \$22 for families (includes one name tag). Make checks payable to the Tucson Corvair Association and mail to the TCA Treasurer.

Change of Address: Report any change of address or phone number to the Membership Chair.

CORSA membership dues are \$45 per year (\$90 for 26 months) and include a subscription to the CORSA Communiqué, a monthly publication. Rates are \$37 per year and \$74 for 26 months for a "virtual" membership. CORSA membership is not required for membership in the Tucson Corvair Association, but is highly recommended. See any TCA officer for more information.

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**Third Tues
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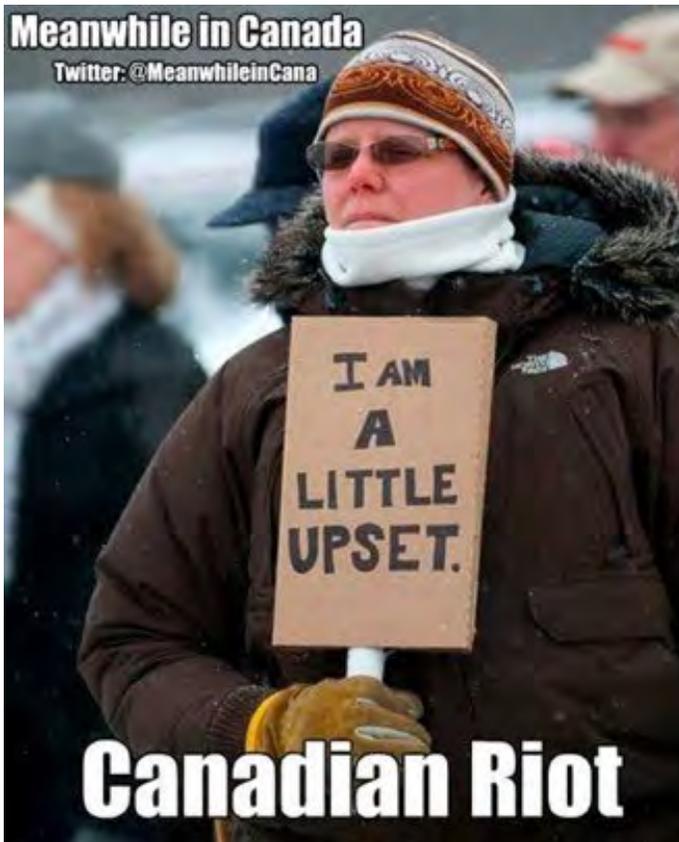
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Dave Lynch passes

On July 24, 2020 long time member of the Tucson Corvair Association, Dave Lynch died in his sleep unexpectedly.

Served as President in 2007 and again ten years later in 2017. He also served as Vice President in 2006.

Dave served his country as a member of the United States Air Force for 10 years but returned in 2010 to a canine unit in Afghanistan with his bomb-sniffing buddy Caesar. Dave was a true patriot.

Dave was one of those rare individuals that only had one car! And, you guessed it, it was his 1967 Corvair Monza 110/auto. Dave bought the car from TCA Dave Baker and over the years continued to make improvements to the car and still had great plans for it when he left us. His brother Tom plans on taking it back to Minnesota.

Dave will be greatly missed by all.



Dave and Caesar in Afghanistan, 2010



C8 CORVAIR

There's no doubt that the mid-engine C8 Corvette represents a major evolution for the iconic sports car nameplate, but it's hardly the first GM vehicle to mount the engine behind the cabin. For example, the Chevrolet Corvair is most notable for its innovative rear-mounted engine layout. So then – what about combining the modern C8 Corvette powertrain with the classic styling of the Corvair? What would *that* look like? Well, as it turns out, that's exactly what we have here in the following renderings dubbed the “Corv8.”

Posted to social media by automotive artist Abimelec Design (@abimelecdesign), this high-quality rendering stuffs the C8 Corvette's naturally aspirated 6.2L V8 LT2 engine and a ZF M1L eight-speed dual-clutch transmission into the rear end of a 1965 Chevy Corvair, and the result is impressive. The artist did a wonderful job making the transplant look like a real engine swap, including a number of cut-aways to show off all the technical details, such as a custom cradle loosely based on a Porsche 550 Spyder, and a custom exhaust system to boot.

When equipped with the optional performance exhaust system, the C8 Corvette's LT2 engine produces 495 horsepower and 470 pound-feet of torque, which is a hefty sum for a vehicle like the lightweight Corvair. As such, the artist decided to add custom pushrod suspension to the mix, taking cues from the Koenigsegg One:1 for the design. There's also a set of big brakes to make sure the C8 Corvette-powered Corvair is, as the artist puts it, “safe at any speed.”

With the modern guts of a C8 Corvette and the old-school cool of a Chevy Corvair, this sporty mash-up is thoughtfully executed and tastefully designed.

“50 yrs after the death they are still trying to remake a Corvair.”

Jack Fids



The Air-Cooled Iconoclast – 1965 Chevrolet Corvair Corsa vs. Porsche 911 *(continued from page 1)*

cautionary tales have never subsided, the reality is that by the second attempt, Corvair engineers had remedied those early troubles by supplanting the rear swing axle for a fully independent suspension with coil springs at all four corners.

Plus, the Corvair now had a larger anti-sway bar with control arms up front and a rear anti-sway bar. The suspension revisions lessened the necessity for adequately maintaining uneven tire pressures, an essential obligation on the first generation. Corsa models, in particular, received more massive brake drums, a sportier suspension, and quicker steering. Plus, there was also an optional Z17 Handling Package endowing Corvairs with even sportier steering and suspension equipment.

Early 911 also suffer a besmirched handling reputation. Horrific tales of snap-oversteer are rampant among automotive communities, but the 911's rear suspension was never as bad as the original Corvair. This is primarily due to the fact that Porsche's rear suspension arrangement (torsion bar with trailing arms) is a logical improvement over inexpensive swing arm setups. Upfront, MacPherson struts and A-arms work with torsion bars and an anti-sway bar to provide drivers with extraordinary precision. A big upper hand for the Porsche resides within its braking, which is supplied at all four corners courtesy of rotors instead of drums.

Based atop the Corvair line-up, the Corsa came standard with a 2.7-liter air-cooled flat-six engine uniquely designed with four Rochester one-barrel carburetors feeding larger valves within redesigned heads. While there was an optional 180-horsepower turbocharged version, the standard-issue setup was the superior choice given its increased reliability with a broader usable powerband. Plus, at an output of 140 horsepower and 160 lb-ft of torque, the Corsa earns the upper head over the 911's respective 130 and 129 figures. However, the 911 is making this power with 700cc less displacement, which serves to keep its curb weight below that of the Corvair.

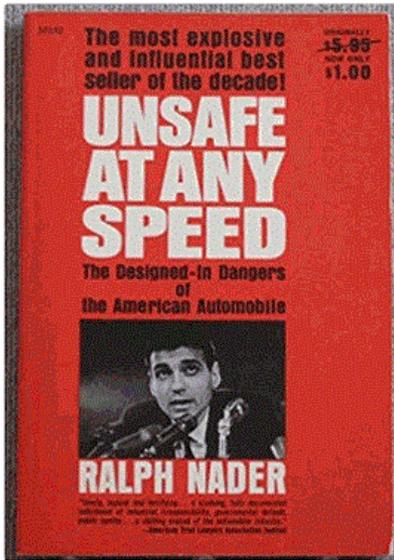
While standardized metrics for either one of these machines are difficult to lock down, the general consensus will delight Corvair confederates. The 911 completes a sprint to sixty in roughly nine seconds while the Corvair trails by one and a half seconds but after about 17-seconds both cross the quarter-mile mark in near unison. Almost immediately after, though, the Corvair's spirit will suffer as it quickly begins to lose momentum, eventually struggling to surmount 105 mph. Meanwhile, the 911 fervently steams on to a top speed of around 130. Of course, final drive options alter these figures, but a five-speed manual in the 911 and four-cog box in

the Corvair truthfully create a close real-world competition. In fact, they may run too close for some people to brag about their investment comfortably.

In summation, the Chevy and the Porsche have approximately the same real-world performance figures. They have similarly arranged, sport-focused interior layouts with parallel levels of equipment and exclusivity. Moreover, while the preference is subjective, the Corvair's European-inspired exterior – although a bit brasher – is bespoke, particularly in Corsa configuration. When new the Corvair Corsa could be had for around \$2500, while the 911 would set a buyer back \$6500. In contemporary currency, a Corvair in mint-condition could be had twice over for the cost of a sixties 911, but at a comparable price to a 912.

So is the 911 name and prestigious Porsche pedigree taking collectors to the proverbial cleaners? Indeed, that is a worthy debate. While their designs, performance figures, and pedigree all warrant scrutiny, there is unquestionably an unaccountable variable amongst each. At the end of the day, the 911 was a range-topping, racing-inspired, equipped, and tested champion that regularly won contemporary races with little more than minor modifications. The Corvair, however, was an entry-level, sports car plagued by a bad reputation from its childhood. Its engineering prowess only improved by coercion from public opinion, yet it still provides for a persuasive counterpoint – especially to 912 buyers pining for a 911 experience.





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Love at First Site!

While in high school a friend of mine had a '62 Monza that we tooted around in. It was sure fun to drive! I was a poor boy and was lucky to have a \$65 Henry J, so a nice fancy Corvair was totally out of the question.

After high school I went to Chile for 2 years and was pretty much out of touch with all things automotive.

One day in late 1964 I received an envelope from my friend back in the U.S. containing a '65 Corvair sale brochure. On the cover was the all new Corvair Corsa. Needless to say I was completely under the spell of the great new styling. I wasn't too keen on the Evening Orchid color but what a beautiful car.

It was indeed "love at first sight! The rest is history.

Van Pershing

